

# CIG HARVEY

Hello Cig. Introduce yourself. Who are you and what do you do for a living?

My name is Cig and I am a British photographer based out of Maine, USA. I arrived here in 1999, after a circuitous route of traveling and living in different countries, to study for my MFA in photography. I choose to live in Maine, a rural state, because it offers a simple way of life and gives me the space to think. I spend my days making photographs and artist's books, primarily for fine art, but I also teach workshops and shoot commercially so I get to travel a fair bit as well. It's a good balance.

How did you first become involved in photography?

I fell in love with photography at the age of thirteen. I worked in a community darkroom and spent my days in that babbling brook of sound and the evocative red half-light, watching pictures magically emerge before me. I loved the smell of the chemistry and making something tangible that didn't exist before. I could print an idea on a piece of paper and then walk home with that physical manifestation in my bag each night. I still feel that way all these years later. What a way to live! I am so very grateful for photography, it has been the true constant in my life.

Can you talk a bit about some of your work over the years?

My work is constantly evolving as the ideas I am concerned with change. It is one of the reasons why I am so in love with this medium. Just when I think I understand what I'm making, I don't. I love that. It still feels as fresh to me as it did when I was thirteen, first picking up that camera and realizing that you can tell stories and secrets through pictures. Originally my background was in street/documentary but a shift happened in my mid-twenties, when I started making personal work: images that used autobiography as a device to tap into the universal.

You recently published new book 'You Look At Me Like An Emergency'. What's been your selection process for the book?

Well, like most books it was a labor of love. Ten years of pictures and writing which took almost four years to put together into the book that finally got published. I kept thinking it was done, but then there was always something that wasn't quite right. I was conscious that once the book had an ISBN number, it would be in the public domain forever, and that every element needed to feel resolved before it went to press. I wanted to feel like even if it failed to sell a single copy, it didn't matter; that I loved it and it was the right book for me, you know? I am a hard-worker, very dedicated to the discipline of making art, even when I don't feel like it, so it shocked me that it took so long. Emergency is a true narrative book with a start, middle and end. It's story about identity, of making mistakes, facing life's challenges and trying to learn from it all. It's about change and a life being lived.

Why did you name the book as 'You Look At Me Like An Emergency'?

It came from the stare my husband gave me when I first met him. It was sort of extraordinary. At that time in my life it was absolutely the last thing I expected.

Sweet. What types of people inspire you to take their photograph?

I photograph the people that I am surrounded by, usually family and friends, so that I can recognize that moment when I don't know them, and then make the picture. In that frame our relationship is somehow compromised and the familiar is foreign. I've always been interested in what is universal and timeless in a portrait. I seek out locations, light, weather, which isolates and provides a stage for the gaze or gesture of the subject. The photographs I am now interested in are the ones I least understand. I try to be unnerved, jolted and displaced by my pictures.

What do you ask them in front of your camera?

Typically I tell them about the ideas I am working on, ideas that I have written about and brainstormed how to tell visually and but then when I pick up the camera I try to let all the constructed, cerebral stuff go. I truly believe the subconscious is streets ahead of conscious thought and, for me, if it all gets too 'planned' then the pictures start to feel forced and contrived. It is a constant struggle.

What equipment do you use?

I have a very simple approach to equipment. I taught the technical side of photography for years so I know it inside out, but I am really only interested in it as the tool to get to the heart of the idea or narrative. The formal concerns of a photograph, the light, frame, exposure, print etc for me is always in service to the idea. I still shoot both film and digital, (Hasselblad or Canon) and I try to make my images in camera, approaching Photoshop as if it were the wet darkroom.

What's next for you after the release of new book?

I am hard at work on a new portfolio called, Gardening At Night, which hopefully will become a book one day. It is essentially about the emotions of becoming a new parent and putting down roots in a community. My work has always been concerned with relationships, fear and wonder, three qualities that seem to burgeon when you have a child and buy a home for the first time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CIG HARVEY  
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